

Don't Forget!

And they're off! Principals around the country are sprinting into another school year with renewed enthusiasm for helping children learn, while making sure their schools will comply with No Child Left Behind requirements and that every subgroup of students will demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress on standards-based achievement tests. They hope to accomplish these objectives by using the best research-based methods available and implementing professional development programs that will provide their schools with highly qualified teachers in every classroom.

Many principals have used the summer to scan the professional literature in order to stay on top of emerging issues in such areas as reading, math, tutoring, school choice, alternative certification, helping at-risk students, and preserving arts instruction and physical education. Although they may lack resources, they're committed to doing the best they can with what they have.

But as exciting and energizing as their back-to-school preparations may be, principals may need to be reminded to give parent involvement the priority it deserves.

Powerful Proof

I have just spent several weeks immersed in the development of some new parent involvement materials, which included an intensive review of the research. As you'd guess, I don't need to be convinced of the importance of parent involvement in the education of our children. But my recent study of the research stunned me with the volume and power of the supportive evidence. Here's a sampling:

We have had solid research about the impact of families in education since the mid-1960s, when the landmark Coleman report studied the impact of both families and schools on educational achievement.¹ The study sent shock waves through the education world when it reported that the impact of families was overwhelmingly more important than that of schools in explaining differences in school achievement. Coleman's basic findings have been replicated again and again in the United States and other nations.

Home background, including parental support for academic achievement and socioeconomic status, is the most important contributor to academic achievement, according to a recent study by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement of the differences between the highest- and lowest-achieving schools in science and mathematics in 39 countries.² In the United States, 64 percent of the differences in achievement from one school to another were attributable to "home" variables, and similar results were con-



sistent in all countries.

The best predictors of student achievement are not family income or social status, but a home environment that encourages learning, high expectations for achievement and future careers, and being involved in a child's education.^{3,4}

*When fathers are involved in school activities, children have a better chance to succeed in school.*⁵

Student success is related to parent forcefulness in educational goal-setting. Parents who insist that their children go on past high school to college or vocational training are about three times as likely to have children graduate from post-secondary programs than parents who "don't care" about further education.⁶

"Right now, with the new school year before us, is the time to make certain your school has effective plans to support and encourage parent involvement..."

We know that families play a decisive, if sometimes overlooked, role in student achievement—and school success. Right now, with the new school year before us, is the time to make certain your school has effective plans to support and encourage parent involvement, to welcome parents' participation, to keep them informed about school goals and activities, and

to tell them specifically what they can do to help their children learn. ■

References

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